

# News Release

# Senator Pete V. Domenici

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## COMMITTEE CONSIDERS RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD BILL

### Senate Finance Committee Holds Hearing on Bayh-Domenici Bill

WASHINGTON -- The vital importance of fathers in America was at the forefront today as a key Senate panel considered legislation sponsored by Senators Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) and Evan Bayh (D-Ind.) to encourage the role fathers play in their children's lives.

The Senate Finance Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy today received testimony on the Bayh-Domenici **Responsible Fatherhood Act of 1999** (S.1364). Domenici testified on behalf of the bill, which he said addresses the growing trend of American children growing up without their fathers.

"I truly believe that we cannot continue to flourish as a nation with the statistics on the lack of responsible fathers continuing to grow enormously. Clearly, it will take more than one generation for this attitude to change," Domenici said.

"I cannot think of two more important issues facing our nation than the dual goal of promoting marriage and responsible fatherhood," he said. "I believe the role parents play in the lives of their children is to provide love, guidance, and discipline, while at the same time teaching respect, honor, duty and the values that make our nation great."

"And while we all acknowledge the positive benefits of a two parent family, there are more and more families where fathers simply are not present in the lives of their children. All of this affects who our children will become, how they will lead our communities and our nation, and ultimately what kind of parent they will be to their children," he said.

The Bayh-Domenici bill would provide support to states and communities to promote responsible fatherhood and encourage married, two-parent families. It also includes provisions to ease federal restrictions that hinder parents from becoming more actively involved in their children's lives.

Nearly a quarter of all New Mexico families do not have fathers present in the home, and more than 40 percent of babies born in the state are born out of wedlock. Nationally, nearly 25 million--or 36 percent--of all American children live without their biological father. In addition, about 40 percent of these children have not seen their father in the last year.

The promotion of responsible fatherhood and encouragement of two-parent families, Domenici said, should not denigrate the standing of parenting efforts by single mothers, but should increase the chance the opportunities for fathers to have a stronger influence on the lives of their children.

The Bayh-Domenici Responsible Fatherhood Act would:

- C Authorize a \$25 million Challenge Grant program to encourage states and local communities to seek donated air time from broadcasters for public service messages promoting responsible fatherhood, and the formation and maintenance of married, two parent families.
- C Authorize a \$50 million state Block Grant program to provide support for state and local government, nonprofit, charitable and religious organization efforts to promote responsible fatherhood, and the formation and maintenance of married, two parent families.
- C Authorize \$2 million per year to assist states and communities in efforts to promote and support responsible fatherhood.
- C Remove federal barriers to responsible fatherhood by amending existing federal law to encourage a stronger connection between fathers and children through, among other things, increased child support to families.

“Without question, it is difficult to replace a loving, two parent family. As the father of eight, I cherish the time I’ve had with my children and grandchildren,” Domenici said. “But sadly, there is a growing trend among American families that is eroding the father-child relationship. Unfortunately, in many instances they are growing up without the love and guidance of their fathers. If this is to remain a great nation, the trend of absentee fathers must be reversed.”

The Responsible Fatherhood Act is pending before the Senate Finance Committee.

### **Bayh/Domenici Responsible Fatherhood Act of 1999**

#### ***Bill Summary***

- i Congress, states and local communities should help parents to become more actively involved in their children’s lives. States should be encouraged to implement programs that provide support for responsible fatherhood, and federal restrictions should be removed.
- i The promotion of responsible fatherhood and encouragement of married, two-parent families should not denigrate the standing of parenting efforts by single mothers, but should increase the chance that children will have two caring parents to help them grow up healthy and secure.

## **Title I: Public Awareness and Community Involvement**

### **i Media**

Authorizes a \$25 million Challenge Grant program to encourage states and local communities to seek donated air time from broadcasters for messages promoting responsible fatherhood. Donations are matched one-for-one by the federal government, and can be a combined effort on the part of state and local government, media, nonprofit, charitable and religious organizations. Requires at least 50 percent of funds be used to promote the formation and maintenance of married, two parent families, and 50 percent of funds be used to strengthen fragile families and promote responsible fatherhood.

### **i Responsible Fatherhood Block Grant**

Authorizes a \$50 million state Block Grant program to provide support for state and local government, nonprofit, charitable and religious organization efforts to promote responsible fatherhood. Requires at least 50 percent of funds be used to promote the formation and maintenance of married, two parent families, and 50 percent of funds be used to strengthen fragile families and promote responsible fatherhood. States must match 25 percent using any combination of state funds or in-kind donations from local government, nonprofit, charitable or religious organizations.

### **i National Clearinghouse/Evaluation**

Authorizes \$2 million per year to assist states and communities in efforts to promote and support responsible fatherhood. Establishes a National Clearinghouse to produce and distribute television, radio, and print advertisements and share successful efforts among communities. Provides for evaluation of program efforts and review of funding impact.

## **Title II: Removing Federal Barriers to Responsible Fatherhood**

### **i Child Support Enforcement Pass-Through**

\* Research demonstrates that fathers are more connected with their children and more likely to pay child support when they believe their child support is going directly to their family, and not to the government.

\* A mandate in the original welfare reform law in 1995 required states to pass-through the first \$50 of child support directly to the family without counting against their income for purposes of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) eligibility. The federal government shared the cost of that pass-through

with the state. The mandate (and federal support) ended in 1996. Fewer than half of the states now provide this pass-through.

\* This provision would reestablish the federal government as a partner to states that want to exercise an option to pass-through up to \$75 of child support payments per month directly to the family without impacting TANF eligibility.

**i Child Support Funds Flexibility**

Allows states to use child support funds on fatherhood initiatives instead of paying funds back to TANF. Eight states currently have waivers from HHS to implement this program. An additional 10 states have applications pending before HHS for similar waivers. This provision would allow states this flexibility without a waiver if they exercised the pass-through provision and as long as the funds are used for fatherhood promotion services.

**i TANF Bonus Performance Pool**

Maintenance of two-parent families is currently a goal of the TANF program. This provision would require HHS to include formation and maintenance of two-parent families as a factor in distributing TANF Bonus Performance Pool funds. Proposed HHS guidance for distributing this \$2 billion bonus pool currently focus solely on states' ability to move welfare recipients to work.